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**PRESENCE OF SPACE**

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**MATERIALS:** wire, paper pulp, space, time, labor

## INTRODUCTION

*Presence of Space* is an installation work of art questioning the idea of space, time, and labor. *Presence of Space* suggests a different role for a gallery space, where works of art are usually located and viewers are welcome. By filling the gallery with wire structures and the resulting cast shadows, the gallery space introduces viewers to an illusion of timeless but momentary pause.

When I arrived in the United States to study art, I became interested in space and time. I had to confront that which was unfamiliar. This allowed me to look at myself and what surrounded me. To find the meaning of my existence in these new circumstances, it was necessary to define where I was and what I was doing. These questions also led me to study the place, Korea, where I had come from. As a student of art, I have explored a way to convey part of my identity through this installation of art, *Presence of Space*.

My interest in lines expressed in space originated from my Korean aesthetic tradition. Through my research in the Korean aesthetic tradition as evidenced in the line work in clothing and architecture, I have addressed my own interest in line. My work draws on the idea of line quality through crosshatched lines of wire structures hung in the air.

## **PRESENCE OF SPACE**

The installation conveys an image of physical presence in the gallery space and also deals with the notion of timeless labor. Thousands of handmade constructed wire units are combined and suspended, and their shadows are cast. Each piece is made of a simple wire structure and then enlarged by tying units together. The wire net-like structure grows reaching out toward the gallery entrance. It becomes a statement, which further engages the viewer in implied human labor. Some of the wire has been dipped into kozo paper pulp. This helps the viewer concentrate on airy fullness. Natural white kozo paper gives a sense of the off-white of Korean traditional doors and windows (Kum, Ki Sook, *Choson Bokshik Misul*, 1994) and visually integrates more with the white walls of the gallery.

The visual effects of fullness and emptiness are co-related. Emptiness and fullness have opposite meanings but have the same function, which is to complete the presence of objects/persons. Having sufficient negative space for subjects in traditional drawings has been considered of enormous importance in Korea. It is because having enough room makes an object complete its presence through spatial relationship, causing the viewer to become engaged as the third variable in the relationship between space and an object. The space is determined in the eye of a viewer; therefore it becomes a relative perception of space.

When there is space without any object or human being, it is usually regarded as empty. Emptiness haunts me because there is definite and infinite existence, which determines my thoughts and emotions. This idea is contradictory to the former

assumption of “the space is determined in the eye of a viewer.” When I am left alone in an empty space, I feel contradictory confusion and experience both a sense of controlling and of being controlled. This makes me recognize the strong sense of the presence of space. Vast enclosed spaces are sometimes uncomfortable for me. A big hall or an interior playground will linger negatively in my thoughts.

My interest in the presence of space is reflected in this installation of wire work. An enclosed space filled with a wire net-like structure indicates an objectified space, the presence of space. By filling an empty space with numerous lines, the beauty of the emptiness becomes fullness.

I have researched Korean aesthetics of the *Choson* Dynasty (1392-1910); most architectural ruins in Korea and costumes that interest me are from the later period of *Choson*. My appreciation for lines originates from calligraphy and Korean aesthetics in line. Calligraphy is one example of line quality that I have been trained to appreciate. Korean traditional costume, *Han-bok*, is also drawn according to these principles as shown in the sophisticated lines of this clothing and the silhouette it makes. Kum said in her book, *The Choson Bokshik Misul*, “Traditional Korean costume during the *Choson* period had comfortable and voluminous forms with beautiful curved lines and rhythm. The most favored colors were white and the natural colors of the material such as off-white.”<sup>1</sup>

Korean architecture also provides a natural source of inspiration for line quality. A traditional Korean house conveys a sculptural image of layers of lines. The lines in

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<sup>1</sup> Kum, Ki Sook, *Choson Bokshik Misul*, 1994, p. 195

frames of windows and doors, exposed crossbeams of ceilings and pillars generate a sculptural and transparent quality. *Chang Ho Zi* (Korean traditional paper) was attached to a door frame. It was functional both in winter and summer. In winter, *Chang Ho Zi* protected a room from harsh wind but still held air to make the room warm enough. In summer, it allowed the wind to pass through, so that the room did not get too hot. *Chang Ho Zi* implies the idea of *in* and *out*; *separation* and *connection*. The curved lines of eaves, ridges, and the channels between the rows of roof tiles represent the Korean aesthetic.<sup>2</sup> A curvy eave of *Choson* architecture connects man-made culture to the sky. For me, layers of beams appearing in a roof ridge inspire a sense of timeless lines.

Lines expressed in three dimensions interest me in this work of art.

Crosshatched lines depicted through repeated layers of wire contribute to the aesthetic of this installation. Numerous lines fill the emptiness and articulate their own voice as a strong mass or volume because they embrace the surrounding space. The lines in the air depict a metaphor of time that links the past and present. The crosshatched lines suspended in the air are intended to represent the spiritual dimension of spatial time, where there is no ultimate end. The lines are a signifier of time.

The physical weight of presence in the gallery space denotes timeless labor, which represents one aspect of my presence. The lines are the outcome of my labor and devoted time. A Japanese weaver, Chiyoko Tanaka said in the video, *Textile*

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<sup>2</sup> Kum, Ki Sook, *Choson Bokshik Misul*, 1994, p. 174



*Magicians*, that she wove time while she was weaving textiles.<sup>3</sup> Her words struck me and made me reconsider how my labor is related to time. The women of the *Choson* dynasty between the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries, identified their presence in embellished cloth wrappers, *Bojagi*, through making their own time for the joy of creation.<sup>4</sup> Along with their daily tasks, keeping house, the *Choson* women expressed their existence through their existence through their labor of artwork. As I created the thousands of repetitive layers of cross-hatching lines indicating time manipulating wire, I was consuming time not knowing where and when I was.

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<sup>3</sup> Zafartu, Cristo, *Textile Magicians*, 1996

<sup>4</sup> Kuk Rip Jung Ang Bak Nul Gwan, *Han Guk ui Mi*, 1998, p. 144

## **THE EXHIBITION**

The object of this work is to fill a gallery space and experiment with a new way of using it. The gallery itself plays an important role as exhibition space. The wire net-like structure installed in the whole gallery space reaches the windows and the entrance. Wire at the gallery entrance pushes the viewer away. That is an unexpected experience for a viewer who tries to enter the gallery space. The audience is supposed to be welcome, but upon experiencing the idea of intruding upon and disturbing the work, the viewer is confronted with a disconnection from the gallery space. The constructed wire itself becomes the gallery space. This wire net-like structure determines the viewer's perception of space and objects, and it makes him/her reconsider the nature of the gallery space. The viewers experience space they cannot be part of. The viewers have a chance to objectify and then observe the gallery space only through the windows from the outside. However, there is a translucency of the openwork in wire and window that connects the inner space as seen from the outside of the gallery. Both openness and separation are essential characteristics of this installation.

The shadows cast by the light create ever-changing secondary images that compliment the intimate fullness of the space. However, the hardest thing to accomplish in this installation has been to discover how controlled lighting will cast sharp shadows of fine wire. To resolve this, I experimented with gallery and theatre lighting equipment. I found that the density of layers did not allow the fine shadows of the wire to produce a sharp shadow. Theatre lighting reflects the object while it

projects a cast shadow a little bit sharper than gallery lighting. The gallery lights are dimmer than theater lighting and they project subtle cast shadows. My choice is to use the gallery lights because the overall atmosphere of *Presence of Space* needs to be natural and subtle.

## CONCLUSION

Experiencing space through an installation of lines is the key to this exhibition. A space of time and labor has become part of my presence. *Presence of Space* is the representation of my presence. The work has become a signifier for my place, time and labor. The goal of this exhibition is to take time to observe where I am. If I understand where I am, I could say what I am.

After I came to study art in the United States, I started asking myself the lifetime question concerning who I am. To some degree, I felt lost in this new place. As a student of art, I started manipulating wire with no more than the simple desire for creativity. Creating openwork in wire led me to discover that crosshatched lines generate spatial time through repeated labor. The repeated wire lines gradually have become my main never-ending obsessive task to perform. By tying wire, I recognize my existence not through the physical outcome of the wire net but through the process of making it. Layers of wire lines also denote a space that links me to new circumstances. Through this process, I make connections with other people. The viewer will perceive my devoted time through the physical presence of space filled with wire and recognize a link between himself/herself and me. Therefore, the gallery space is understood as an arena of the relationship to my time and space. I use wire to capture the link to people.

I want to add my afterthoughts concerning my thesis show, *Presence of Space*, during and after my thesis exhibition. While dealing with space was my main concern, I discovered that filling the gallery space with layers of wire structures

became the most unresolved aspect of *Presence of Space*. The gallery space became huge when the actual installation began. The room had more negative space where layers of wire were not present, than I expected. I started to wonder how many layers of wire structure would be needed to fill the gallery in terms of objects and negative space. How much filling of the space would make the gallery full? Installing the wire structures made me experience the process of filling space and the results were somewhat different from what I had expected. The process of making art needs to be appreciated as much as the envisioning of the final product. I have learned much about the relationship between labor, time, and space. I have gained a fuller appreciation for the process of making and installing art.



Plate 1



Plate 2



Plate 3





Plate 4



Plate 5

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